

## INTERVIEW WITH THE *SUNDAY TIMES*

Stephen Paul of the *Sunday Times* interviews Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.

The first question I would like to ask you is how many followers do you have in the U.K. and in the whole world?

I suppose there would be around eight to ten thousand at the most in the United Kingdom. This I can estimate from the attendance of important functions which may vary from five to six thousand, but I am not sure.

The estimate made by my predecessor about 10 years ago was 10000000, a little more or less and of which 3 to 4000000 are Pakistani Ahmadis. The number of followers of Ahmadiyya varies from country to country, continent to continent. I think Africa takes second place which is particularly well represented in West Africa. There, in some countries, the number is approximately half a million.

What about your Founder? What were the circumstances in which the sect was founded?

I think the word founder is a misnomer. Every true religion is founded by God. The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is also referred as the Founder of Islam. As far as the general term is concerned and as ordinarily understood, people refer to Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian as the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Community in the context which I have explained. It was revealed to him that he had been appointed the Promised Reformer of the latter days. That is how the Community was founded. It happened in stages. The first revelation he received from God regarding his commission was that he had been chosen for important tasks. Slowly and steadily over a number of years he received many revelations in which he was informed that he was the Mahdi or Promised Reformer whose advent had been foretold by the Holy Prophet of Islam. Then it was revealed to him that Jesus did not ascend physically to heaven as was generally understood. He was a prophet of God who died a natural death, after having been delivered alive from the cross in a state of coma or swoon. Later his wounds were treated by his disciples. Ointment was applied and gradually he gained strength. He lived for a while in the same area but after regaining full strength he migrated, in accordance with his own prophecy, in search of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. All this was not revealed to the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in so many words as I am explaining to you but the fundamental points were revealed to him. Therefore in the light of these revelations he studied *The Holy Quran*, Bible and history and established the Ahmadiyya viewpoint which I have described in a nutshell. We do not believe Jesus was the son of God in the literal sense but he was a very special prophet of God – with the added title of Messiah. His prayer was accepted and he was saved from the cup of death on the cross.<sup>1</sup> He kept himself hidden for a while and only met his disciples in secret. He avoided people, towns and cities and gradually moved away from the place of crucifixion towards the east. Some people believe that first he travelled north to

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<sup>1</sup> Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

*The Holy Bible*. Hebrews 5: 7. (King James Authorised Version, 1611).

Turkey from where he went to Iraq and Afghanistan eventually ending his journey in Kashmir where he died at the ripe old age of 120 after delivering his message to the lost Jewish tribes who had earlier migrated and settled in Afghanistan and Kashmir. This is a brief narrative but we have produced much literature on this subject. Many an expedition has visited Kashmir to see the tomb of Jesus in Srinagar the capital of the country. Gradual interest is being shown in this subject. It is not possible for me to explain everything fully with more evidence as time is brief but in short this is what we believe.

Did he go to Kashmir with his mother?

*The Holy Quran*, of course, does mention briefly, that she was saved from the crisis in the following words:

And We made the son of Mary and his mother a Sign and We rescued them *and helped them reach* an elevated land, a restful place with springs of running water.<sup>2</sup>

The word **ءَاوَيْنَا** is an Arabic word which means to give somebody shelter or saving one from a particularly dangerous situation. So the verse says **ءَاوَيْنَاهُمَا** meaning that God saved both Mary and her son and settled them in a place as described in the foregoing verse. We certainly believe, therefore, that Mary accompanied him. As far as historical evidence is concerned people hold different opinions. Some people such as Dr. Nazir Ahmad<sup>3</sup> who wrote a book on the life of Jesus in India has taken the hill station Murree to be the burial place of Mary because there is a grave called Mary's grave. Nobody knows how old is the grave and who was buried in it but legend states that it is very old and that it is the grave of a very pious lady who died while travelling from place to place. This is the only legend now left. In his book Dr. Nazir Ahmad has taken the stand that the grave is that of Mary, the mother of Jesus. I am not so sure about that because there are so many graves attributed to the name Mary and I even came to learn that there is a grave in Japan about which there is a legend that it might be the grave of Jesus' mother. I had it investigated and it was, of course, just a legend. I do believe, however, that Mary did travel with her pious son.

In *The Holy Quran* where is the reference made to the holding of the office of the Promised Messiah?

In so many places particularly in Sura' Jumu'a where it is mentioned:

It is He who hath raised from amongst the unlettered a Messenger who recites unto them His Signs and purifies them and teaches them the Book and wisdom, though before this they had been in manifest error.

And shalt raise him amongst others who have not yet joined them. He is the Mighty the Wise. That is Allah's grace which He bestows on whomsoever He pleases. And Allah is the Master of immense grace.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Quran*. al-Muminun [The Believers]: 51.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad, Khwaja Nazir. *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*. (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1952, 1956, 1972, 1988, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Quran*. al-Jumu'a [Day of Congregation]: 3, 4.

Sura' Jumu'a means 'To bring up the things together; congregation.' That is why Friday is called Juma, the day of congregation. This congregation can be applied to the global congregation as well or the congregation in time. This is the subject being discussed in the Sura', God says 'It is He who hath raised from amongst the unlettered a Messenger'. After Muhammad, peace be upon him, was raised to the position of a Prophet he began to recite and teach the people the verses revealed to him although he was illiterate in the sense that he did not know much about the world. Also he began to teach them not only the philosophy of *The Holy Quran* but also the law itself. The Sura' goes on to say 'And shalt raise him amongst others who have not yet joined them' and 'That is Allah's grace which He bestows on whomsoever He pleases.' No one is going to dictate to Allah concerning to whom or to whom not He gives His blessings. We understand this to be a clear Prophecy about a Prophet who would be in complete subordination to the Holy Prophet of Islam otherwise he would not be given his name which indicates he would bring no new revealed religion. He would revive the faith of Islam. This is our interpretation of these verses which is fully supported by a Tradition found in *Bukhari* which is the most authentic book of traditions and gives exactly the same interpretation. It is said that the Holy Prophet recited the fore-going verses of *The Holy Quran* and the Companions asked him the following pertinent question 'Who would they be?' According to the way they put the question I feel that those who heard it thought that the Holy Prophet himself would pay a second visit. No one asked about that but it is apparent. They were wondering who would be those fortunate people among whom he would re-appear. According to this tradition the Holy Prophet of Islam corrected their view and gave them the clear answer that he would not re-appear. The person would be somebody else who would come after a long time and would not be an Arab. He put his hand on one by the name of Salman Farsi, a Persian, and said 'If faith were to go to the Pleiades, a man from these, would surely, find it.'<sup>5</sup> This is very clear and it is not an interpretation that we put into the mouth of the Holy Prophet. It is an interpretation which was made by the Holy Prophet himself. A Reformer is promised who would appear in the latter days and the purpose of his advent would be to rehabilitate the true faith of Islam. He would not be an Arab but a person of Persian descent. We must remember that at that time Persia was a much larger country than that of modern Persia (Iran), he could have meant any part of that larger Persia which existed in those days.

Why do other Muslims not accept this clear reference?

It is very obvious and yet not obvious. Whenever somebody is raised by God, the references about him are always clear but in the beginning nobody accepts them. The same thing happened with regard to Jesus. We are told that there were so many clear references about him but the Jews rejected him in the beginning and still persist to do so. Similar was the case with the Holy Prophet of Islam. There are clear prophecies in the Bible foretelling his advent which we quote in our discussions with Christians but large majority of them, and the Jews, reject him. It is a matter of the internal attitude of the people. God only raises Messengers when the people have gone astray. They have a distorted attitude of life. Basically they are untruthful. The people who have gone wrong simply are unable to accept anyone. They just make excuses for rejecting him and do not go under his harness and accept his authority. This is a universal phenomenon and there is nothing unusual about it. Again Ahmadiyya is spreading all

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<sup>5</sup> al-Bukhari, Imam abu-Abdullah Muhammad bin-Ismael. *Sahih Bukhari*.

over the world. Arabs as well as non-Arabs are accepting it. We have established membership in 120 countries during the past 100 years. These, of course, are our arguments. They carry weight with some people. We believe that the source of understanding Islam throughout the world will come through Ahmadiyya.

I would like to point out that despite the rejection by the majority of Muslims, there have been waves after waves of revived interest in Ahmadiyya and then we receive a large influx of Muslims. Then for a while the *Ulema* (Muslim Clergy) become very hostile and raise a hue and cry against us and we slow down a bit in our progress and then again we regain our position. The same thing happened to Christianity and this is the point I want to make. If the claim of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to be the Promised Messiah is correct then he and his people should have experienced the same hostilities and support from God. Their progress and spread should have been on the same pattern as that of Christianity. It should not have been fast and immediate in spreading everywhere but slow and gradual with steady but constant progress.

What has been your progress in the United Kingdom and when did somebody first join your sect?

This question can be answered in 2 ways. I think Ahmadiyya was established in the U.K. in 1914, but the first Ahmadi Muslim of the U.K. accepted the faith much earlier. He accepted during the life time of the Holy Founder of the Movement and, I think a Lord. A second person of some standing was mentioned in the obituary of the *London Times* after the demise of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, the Holy founder of the Ahmadiyya Community. He was a scholar and an orientalist. *The Times* indicates that he had good knowledge and that his arguments carried weight.

Was the Woking Mosque the first mosque?

Yes, that is right.

Was that an Ahmadi mosque?

Not in the true sense of the meaning of the word Ahmadiyya because it was funded by some Muslim states, British Lords and other people who were interested in a monumental representation of the mosque. Initially, it was not built for the purpose of worship but in its early involvement there was an Ahmadi tinge particularly in the person of Khwaja Kamaluddin who was a renowned scholar who participated in all this process. He was appointed the first Imam. Gradually he took over the activities of the mosque. He belonged to that section of Ahmadis which did not give allegiance to the *Khalifa* [Caliph] and whose members are known as Lahori Ahmadis.

I am sorry; I am not acquainted with this term.

After the demise of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement a *Khalifa* was elected by the name of Hakīm Maulvi Nuruddin. The Community remained united under him for almost 6 years. After his demise there was a division when a small section of the Community, although at that time it claimed to be in the majority, separated from the main body which believed in *Khilafat* and gave allegiance to the *Khalifa*. The dispute revolved around the person of the *Khalifa* and the office of *Khilafat*. These people believed it was the age of democracy and that there should be an *Anjuman* or Board

of Directors to run the affairs of the Community. The others believed in the institution of *Khilafat* which at the outset all unanimously supported and pledged allegiance at the hands of the first *Khalifa*, Hakīm Maulvi Nuruddin. After offering the pledge one has no right in adopting the attitude of the dissenters. Under the leadership of Maulvi Muhammad Ali and Khwaja Kamaluddin who I mentioned was connected with the Woking Mosque, they separated themselves from the main body of the Ahmadiyya Community which believes in the institution of *Khilafat* within the Community. When I speak about the great progress and rapid spread of Ahmadiyya Community which believes in the institution of *Khilafat* within the Community, when I speak about the great progress and rapid spread of Ahmadiyya all over the world I am talking about this section of the Community which is linked under *Khilafat*.

However the mosque was owned by the non-believers?

Non-believers in *Khilafat* but believers in Ahmadiyya. The mosque was gradually taken over from the Lahoris by the Sunnis and at present it is under their control. Sunni Muslims in as much as there are 2 main Muslim groups the Shias and the Sunnis both of which are again divided into sub-divisions. Fundamentally we belong to the Sunni section of Muslims but when I refer to the Sunnis I mean non-Ahmadi Sunnis.

What is your position regarding the Salman Rushdie Affair?

I have spoken at length on this subject in my last 2 Friday sermons.<sup>6</sup> My position is very clear. *The Holy Quran* repeatedly speaks on the subject of blasphemy but nowhere permits any one or any human authority to take punitive measures against those who commit blasphemy. On the contrary it teaches patience and exhorts us to admonish such people and sever our ties with them for as long as they remain blasphemous. In my Friday sermon I quoted verses from *The Holy Quran* for which I can give the references. Imam Khomeini, or anybody, else, may speak for himself but he cannot speak on the authority of *The Holy Quran* in passing judgement of death or any other punishment on anybody for blasphemy. Regarding the Western attitude I feel it is very unfair on the part of Western governments only to highlight Khomeini's action of passing the death sentence and forgetting the man he really is, and also attributing his attitude to Islam or a section of Islam. Very recently in his own country there was a television interview in which ladies were speaking about the good qualities and character of Hazrat Fatima who was the wife of Hazrat Ali and the daughter of the Holy Prophet of Islam. This programme was being presented to mark her birthday. One of the ladies innocently remarked that whatever was being said about Fatima was very good but she liked the kind of lady who serves and works for mankind and for those who are suffering, and so on. This remark offended Khomeini so much that first of all he ordered the killing of all those people who participated in the programme. Later he revised his verdict after some people interceded but still he passed judgement that so and so should be imprisoned for 15 years or for life. The producer was to be executed immediately and so he was. Now what can you expect from such a man? What could you expect from Hitler or Mussolini? They were the people who were Fascists under some name. Why, therefore, should Islam be blamed for the idiocies of a person who does not seem to be in full command of his senses?

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<sup>6</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> February and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1989. (*Khutbat e Tahir*: viii). 111 – 153.

This has been highlighted while the filth of the book and the dastardly attack on Islam and the holy personages of Islam has been made in the most filthy language of mockery. All this has been ignored as if nothing has happened in the name of human conscience and freedom of speech. Why does not freedom of speech stop you from condemning filth when you see it? The sensitivities of a thousand million Muslims have been injured. If a man is murdered you think of the harm inflicted but you are unable to imagine how so many people in the world are truly and deeply suffering because of some most unwarranted attack which is said to be fiction. Why is a fiction woven around real and historic personalities who are held in high veneration and respect? That fiction contains filthy and cheap language which even the British would not tolerate in their society a hundred years ago.

Is it the language which is offensive or the idea?

This is a very good question. It is not blasphemy to oppose or deny Islam. Muslims do not consider it to be an offence to dub Islam as wrong on the basis of arguments. The attacks of orientalist on Islam have always been well taken. We have written books in response to their attacks which is a fair game. This writing of fiction, however, is not only an unfair game but does not give us the opportunity to defend ourselves. How can we defend fiction? Somebody might say that it is just fiction. The impression given is that Salman Rushdie resurrects all the allegations of Christian attacks on Islam in the past and in a very cunning way. They leave a message behind which most non-Muslims would take as something real in the name of fiction and which no Muslim can defend because how can you defend fiction?

What have you to say to Christians who are unhappy about the books which you publish about Jesus in which you say he is not the son of God? Is this not [to] be thought as clear blasphemy?

This has been very well explained by British common law itself? The legal judgement is very logical on this issue and says that it is not blasphemy at all to oppose Christian doctrines with logic and reason. Blasphemy is the use of a mocking attitude, filthy language and using an ironic tone in order to injure the feelings and sentiments of people. Perhaps not exactly in these words but you will realise the wisdom of the law if you read it.

What is your relationship with other Muslim communities in Britain and the world? Would you, for example, worship in the same mosque?

Of course we would if permitted. We do so when nobody knows who is who. I will say my prayers in Sunni mosques even if they have been built by Saudi Arabia. There is no problem at all. We believe that mosques are for all people. As Ahmadi Muslims we believe on the authority of the Holy Prophet of Islam that mosques should remain open even for Christians. On one occasion a delegation of Christians from Najran came and held a discussion with the Holy Prophet. They wanted to take leave from him to offer their prayers. He told them that they could say their prayers in the mosque which is a house of God. This is the Islam which we understand from the conduct of the Holy Founder of Islam and not the Islam which you know from the medieval Muslim scholars which is the product of the political age in which the kings and so-called Caliphs wanted some authority to trample upon human rights in the name of religion and so on and so forth. We go to the original sources and that is why

I quote from *The Holy Quran* and Traditions. We do not believe in interpretations of the medieval ages.

What did the Founder or Community add to Islam? What is the specific thing?

That is the point. He did not add anything. What he did was to remove the additions.

What additions would I find?

There are so many. For instance the belief in *Jihad* which permits the use of the sword for the spread of the message. This is an addition because we believe and can prove from the authority of *The Holy Quran* and the *Sunnah* (actions of the Holy Prophet) that he never used the sword as an offensive weapon. He only used it in defence for which purpose it is permitted:

Permission is granted to those against whom war is made because they have been wronged - and indeed Allah has the power to help them.<sup>7</sup>

This is the first verse in *The Holy Quran* which was revealed in connection with permission for the Muslims to defend themselves with the sword. During the previous 13 years of persecution in Mecca the Holy Prophet of Islam did not permit the Muslims to fight in self-defence as he was waiting for the order from God. When permission was granted they were still surrounded by an overwhelming number of their powerful enemies. This verse mentions that now it was permissible for the believers who had been wrongly subjected to the sword to defend themselves. When they have committed no crime and have been turned out of their homes what can they do but defend themselves? The verse says that it is Allah Who is going to give them strength and it is He Who is going to see that they emerge as victorious conquerors. Every Muslim scholar knows that this is the first verse permitting use of the sword. The words are so clear that I am simply unable to understand how different meanings can be attached to this verse. When our opponents contradict our point of view we quote this verse. You will be surprised how nonplussed they become.

What is the word which says that you can use the sword to defend yourself?

أُذِنَ means 'permitted'. الَّذِينَ means 'those people'. يُقَاتِلُونَ is a passive verb which means against whom the sword has already been used. No one on earth who knows a little Arabic can give a different translation. It is not 'who are fighting'. If they are already fighting why do they need permission? It is يُقَاتِلُونَ 'against whom people have raised the sword'. ظَلَمُوا اللَّهَ 'because they have been wronged'. وَإِن عَلَى اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ 'God is powerful enough to make them victorious'. Then it says الَّذِينَ أَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ 'these are the people who have been turned out of their homes without any justification'. إِلَّا أَن يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ 'Except that they claimed that God is our Lord'. That was the only crime they committed. *The Holy Quran* then goes on to explain the philosophy of Jihad:

These are those who have been driven out of their homes unjustly just for saying 'Our Lord is Allah' and if Allah did not repel certain people by means of others there would surely have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and

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<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Quran*. al-Hajj [The Pilgrimage]: 40.

mosques wherein the name of Allah is oft invoked. And Allah will surely help one who helps His cause. Allah is indeed the Powerful the Mighty.<sup>8</sup>

If God had not given this permission to take up arms in self-defence then we see Churches, synagogues and mosques destroyed and demolished. This is what I have been telling the whole world. See the beauty of Islamic teachings on the subject of Jihad. It speaks by illustrations mentioning the sacred places of worship of other religions before including mosques. According to my definition of Jihad as I understand it from *The Holy Quran* and the Ahmadiyya interpretation I believe that on the authority of this verse it is the responsibility of any Muslim to defend a church if it is being attacked and, while doing so, he would become a martyr should he die. Likewise he rectified so many other beliefs and views such as about angels, heaven and hell etc. During the past so many centuries people had acquired misunderstandings. The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Community rectified these errors of belief which had crept into Islam through the aid of divine revelation and Guidance. He rehabilitated Islam in its pristine purity. That was his claim and that is what we believe he did.

Is there any dialogue between yourself and other Muslims?

Of course. So many times and repeatedly. There was dialogue that was historical in its nature after the death of the Holy Founder of the Community who, during his lifetime remained locked in argumentative discussions and debates. Throughout his life he was extremely busy in defending Islam and in making other Muslims understand its true teachings. After his demise a most historic debate took place in 1974 during the time of Mr. Bhutto when he convened the session of the National Assembly to examine the Ahmadiyya case. He invited the Head of the Ahmadiyya Community, Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, along with 4 other members from the Community of his own choice to appear before this National Court of Inquiry. I happened to be one of those whom my predecessor chose to accompany him. We were examined and cross examined by the Attorney General of Pakistan and representatives of various Muslim sects such as Sunnis, Shias, Wahhabis etc. in such a manner as if we had committed great crimes. This battle of words and arguments continued for 14 continuous days after which we were declared to be non-Muslims. The reason why this debate was historical and why we think we had won the case is because the government of that time and that of General Zia who followed, rejected our pleas to have the debate published. If we had lost the case then why, as they made the world believe, have they rejected our request to have it published and kept it secret? Ahmadiyya Communities all over the world sent telegrams upon telegrams to the Government of Pakistan requesting that it should be published so that they might know on what grounds they had been declared non-Muslims so that they could be aware of their views. The Government still rejected their request. I made public pleas myself during the regime of General Zia.

Other debates also took place. Before I was elected the *Khalifa* I used to travel a great deal in Pakistan. When I was at Rabwah the Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Community - sometimes more than a thousand non-Ahmadis would come there to attend Questions and Answers sessions. Other scholars were appointed for this purpose in addition to myself, but mostly they would like to come and put their questions to me. This practice continued for years and surprisingly for our opponents

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<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Quran*. al-Hajj [The Pilgrimage]: 41.



many of the visitors became Ahmadiis. This was one of the reasons why General Zia became so jittery and also one of the reasons why the Ordinance was passed which prevented us from expressing our views and professing our faith about Ahmadiyya to anyone. This Ordinance was passed on 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1984. Just prior to the passing of this Ordinance I was on a visit to Islamabad, Pakistan, where crowds were coming to attend these sessions to ask questions including the *Ulema* (Muslim clergy) and scholars. The result was that instead of the Government encouraging these people to come so that they could hear, what they believed to be the untruth of Ahmadiyya, they prevented them from all sides to attend our sessions. So much so that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April some convoys bringing people from Peshawar, N.W. Province of Pakistan, to participate in our session were stopped at the Attock Bridge because the Government had sent the C.I.D. to find out the purpose of all individuals on the trucks and buses journeying to Islamabad. Those coming to attend the session were forced to return. Those coming from the Punjab were also stopped; I was surprised to know what was happening because people were still pouring in. Ahmadiyya was rapidly growing popular, so much so, that you would be surprised to know that we distributed invitations in the military headquarters to all the important generals and army officers for a cup of tea as well as the opportunity to ask questions. The video of that function is still with us. You would be all the more surprised to have seen high ranking military officers crying after listening to the answers of the questions. The situation was reported to General Zia who became so panic stricken that he sent an order to the Police Deputy Commissioner that I must leave Islamabad immediately. I asked him if he would give me the order in writing but he said he would not. He told me he was a well-wisher and that the matter was very serious. He said he could not guarantee my safety because crowds might appear today or tomorrow and attack me and that he would be defenceless to help. He said that as the time was very dangerous I must leave the place for the safety of myself and the Community. It was on the 24<sup>th</sup> evening or perhaps the 25<sup>th</sup> morning that I left for Rabwah - our headquarters. On the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> April the Ordinance was declared.

What was the reason for this Ordinance? Was it religious or political?

Of course it is always political. It is also political in religious garb. Whenever a person claims to have been appointed by God he challenges those in authority and the people know that they will be shaken. They know that new and very powerful ideas will be preached which will threaten their leadership and dethrone them. My personal conviction is that the reason for the Ordinance is political and not religious. This I can prove by suggesting that if you look at the behaviour of the *Ulema* you will find that they have become so sensitive to the message of Ahmadiyya with regard to the religious conduct of their own people who drink, womanise, gamble, bribe and take bribes, tell lies. Everything which is forbidden in Islam is carried on in the world of Islam but the *Ulema* do not stir or turn a hair. When they see that the ground is being taken away from under their feet then they become extremely disturbed. They are sensitive to their own position of leadership and not to the values of religion. I think this happens everywhere. During the time of Jesus there were the Pharisees and the Rabbis who felt themselves threatened by the new order. Their opposition had no scriptural backing. They were concerned about their own personal authority being undermined and that is what is happening today.

My last question is why do all religions including Islam cause more bloodshed, harm and division than good? Do you accept that?

I would suggest you to be patient regarding my reply to this question because at present my book in which I have dealt with this question is now being printed in the press in England. This book would comprise approximately 300 pages. I have dealt with all aspects of persecution in the name of religion.

What is the book called?

It is called *Toleration in Islam*.<sup>9</sup>

Is religion more trouble in itself?

That is the question I have dealt with and answered in defence of religion in my book. I believe that it is not the religion which is to be blamed for blood-shed in the name of religion. The political forces of the time exploit the issue and I have quoted many examples and I have also established my point from historical events. I have also taken up the subject of terrorism in Islam, Khomeinism, Gaddafism and such like activities. I wrote the book in 1962 in Urdu at a time that these issues had not been born. The translation of this book was done recently by Prof. Barakat Ahmad who is well known in the field of religious writers. The company which wanted to publish it suggested that as it referred to earlier times it would be better to add 2 new chapters regarding terrorism and tolerance as it is now happening in the world such as in Iran, Libya and elsewhere, otherwise people will say it is a thing of the past and would not be of current interest. Therefore I added 2 new chapters. In this book I think I have thoroughly explained my view and that of the Ahmadiyya Community.

You may come across a situation where some people are opposed to something and others are in favour of it. For example, in Christianity the Church of England is at the moment hounded by the controversy over whether or not there should be women priests, and it constantly causes division among people who are supposed to be seeking God.

That has to be there. There is no other way out. What is important is the truth - the inner truth. If you see or understand something in a certain perspective you must follow it. It is the truth which matters to God. It is possible that 2 people who have opposite fundamental views are both honest. According to my religious philosophy they would both be looked upon with pleasure by God as long as they are honest. Look at this flower pot. We are both looking at it from different angles. If we had not thought it advisable to change places and look at it from the opposite angle otherwise we might go on quarrelling about what it looks like. It is unreasonable to say that everyone must see things exactly as everyone else does. It is the passage of time which brings about these bifurcations and divisions like a spring which flows downhill eventually to become a big river with many tributaries joining it. This is no fault of religion. When people become dishonest, particularly those holding positions of religious leadership and they impose their views in the name of religion for the purpose of exploitation, then they cause schisms which are not genuine. Many of the divisions in different religions take place because of this crooked thinking on the part of some leaders. They may do it advertently or inadvertently but there is something

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<sup>9</sup> *Murder in the Name of Allah*. (Lutterworth Press, 1989, 1990).

wrong in their thinking such as in the case of Khomeini. People have been asking me to condemn him as a false man. I tell them I condemn him only as a wrong man but I see no reason why I should condemn him as a false man because as far as I have seen he is true to his words. There is no hypocrisy in him, no dissidence of any sort. What we find is that he is a mad man. Mad men appear in politics, religion and everywhere. When they do appear in politics then do not condemn politics because Nazi Germany was born of Hitler's distorted views. You do not just abandon politics as being something bad so why should you abandon religion.

It could also be said about Salman Rushdie.

Yes, it could be said so but from the evidence which I have I am inclined to believe that he is not a true man for which there are reasons. He was born in a family which was westernised in style and while not religious was still a Muslim family. He was never maltreated so never had any reason for feeling so embittered about Islam. He is a mercenary. He attempted to draw attention by writing novels of which some were popular and others a failure. Many of his points are based on very weak historical evidence and are unreliable, taken from books such as [those by] al-Tabari and al-Waqidi which are not so reliable. He made no deep investigation into Islamic history but only tried to find unreliable negative points. He goes so far back as to start with the birth of Ishmael who we believe was a blessed child of God about whose progeny the Bible says would be blessed. As Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a descendant of Ishmael, Christians started to debate and reject the fact that Ishmael was also a blessed son of Abraham. As we know the upbringing and teachings of Salman Rushdie he could never turn to the correct sources of Islam and that is why he calls Ishmael a bastard which a Jew has never dared to use about Jesus despite the fact that they believed him to be a mentally unbalanced Jew. They will just say he was not the son of God and that is all. They would leave it to others to think what they like. This is the civilised way of disagreement. To call the founder of a religion who is deeply respected by millions of people a bastard is no decent language. Salman Rushdie, I think, is not the person who should be held responsible. There must have been some kind of conspiracy by someone or some people who wanted to throw a bombshell and who wanted to disturb the peace by tearing apart the world of Christianity and Islam. My impression is that this is not the work of a single person like Salman Rushdie. Thank you very much for your patience.

Thank you very much indeed.